

# University of CONNECTICUT

## Division of Athletics

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### Testimony

By

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Commerce Committee Public Hearing

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Co-Chairs Berger and LeBeau, Ranking Members and Members of the Committee, my name is Jeff Hathaway and I am the Director of Athletics at the University of Connecticut. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to comment on House Bill 5878, An Act Concerning the University of Connecticut Home Football Games.

Let me begin by thanking the General Assembly and the Governor for the state's tremendous investments in the University over the past decade in the form of UCONN 2000, 21<sup>st</sup> Century UConn, and increased operating support. As a result of these investments, the University is now a top choice for increasing numbers of high achieving students and outstanding student-athletes.

You have made UConn a leader in reversing Connecticut's brain drain and today the University is graduating record numbers of undergraduates and graduates, including doctors, dentists, nurses, engineers, teachers, lawyers, and scientists. And I'm proud to report that our student-athletes are part of all of those occupations just mentioned. These accomplishments represent a unique contribution that UConn provides to our state's economic growth that will continue to pay dividends to our region.



You should also be proud that due to your commitment, the University is now ranked 24<sup>th</sup> of all public universities in the nation by U.S. News and World Report, and once again, number one in New England.

Of course, the state investment and support of UConn Athletics, including Rentschler Field, are paying big dividends as well. The success of our football program including two bowl games in the past 4 years is a source of pride to all Connecticut residents. Last year, we had more than 27,000 season ticket holders and nearly all of our home games were sell outs at the 40,000 seat Rentschler Field Stadium.

We were always convinced that our football program would be successful at the Division 1-A level, and we have been very pleased at the speed with which it's actually been accomplished. As I'm sure you know, we were co-champions of the Big East this year in only our 4th year as a member of the Big East Football Conference. The football program continues to enhance the University's national profile, the University's fundraising activities, and our ability to attract great students.

In fact, I consider it an indicator of success that I am even here today in the midst of March Madness, at the height of our basketball season with the #1 ranked women's basketball team in the nation and the 13<sup>th</sup> ranked men's team in the country discussing UConn Football during their off-season. Who would have ever predicted, even five years ago, that the people of Connecticut would be having a conversation about whether the University of Connecticut should add Notre Dame to its football schedule? This is due, in great part, to the state's commitment to UConn Athletics, for which we are truly grateful to the General Assembly, the Governor, our student body, faculty and staff as well as our alums and other fans. But it's also a tribute to the student-athletes and coaching staff of our football program.

In regards to HB 5878, please know that the University does not currently have a contract in place with Notre Dame. Discussions with Notre Dame have been on-going for the past two years and I cannot tell you with any certainty when (or now if) we will have an agreement. I can assure you, however, that even if we enter into a contract with Notre Dame to play in New York and Boston, we will still play a consistent number of home games in Rentschler Field.

Adding Notre Dame to our schedule is worthy of consideration, even if the games are played away from Rentschler Field. Playing Notre Dame would have significant potential benefits. With TV contracts in place today, it would

increase the visibility of our football program by guaranteeing that every game in the series would be nationally televised. That visibility would certainly advance the University's recruitment of highly qualified students and student-athletes in Connecticut and across the country. It would also increase our development efforts and alumni relations activities in the New York and Boston metropolitan areas, where we have large numbers of UConn alumni, supporters and friends.

Coach Edsall and I understand that if we reach an agreement with Notre Dame that there will be some who will be disappointed that games may be played at locations other than Rentschler Field. However, while both of us are aware that some may react adversely to scheduling these games, we must also be concerned with the long-term development and success of our football program. It is for these reasons, that the University urges the Committee not to act favorably on this legislation.

I would also like to comment on House Bill 5881, An Act Concerning Financial Assistance for Amateur Boxing. While the University does not have a boxing program or a boxing club, we were asked to participate in a meeting that the Speaker convened last month with USA Boxing, Incorporated. If USA Boxing, Incorporated were to open a northeast hub in Connecticut, I can appreciate the value of a structured athletic program for young people interested in a program such as this. It may have the additional economic benefit of attracting new sporting events to Connecticut.

Thank you for providing me with this opportunity to comment on legislation under consideration by the Committee. I would be happy to answer any questions.